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AUTHOR Dugan, JoAnn Rubino; Bean, Rita M.
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ABSTRACT

A qualitative study examined the meaning-making processes involved as six struggling readers and a teacher interacted to make sense of a story during small group literature discussions. Students were low-achieving fifth graders. Instruction consisted of partner reading, written response followed by discussion and extended free journal writing. Three discussions were audiotaped and analyzed for changes in student engagement over time. Results indicated that the teacher demonstrated and explained a variety of ways to make sense of the story in response to students' need for support and encouraged them to practice and eventually control the discussions themselves. Students initially expressed reluctance to elaborate and justify their responses and focused on remembering and summarizing the story. However, during the middle discussion, they became initiators and expressed a desire to make decisions about their reading. During the last session, students facilitated the discussion themselves by responding to one another, and were concerned with expressing and justifying their interpretations rather than remembering or summarizing events. The frequency of sociocognitive conflicts, dialogue in which students disagreed or questioned the text and each other, and the number of student-initiated episodes increased dramatically across the three discussions, indicating a shift of responsibility to meaning-making from teacher to students and higher levels of student engagement in the meaning-making process. (Contains 42 references, and 1 figure and 2 tables of data.) (RS)

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Side-by-Side Reading: Scaffolding Meaning-Making Through Literature Discussions

JoAnn Rubino Dugan

Texas A & M University - Commerce

Rita M. Bean

University of Pittsburgh

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Side-by-Side Reading: Scaffolding Meaning-Making Through Literature Discussions

JoAnn Rubino Dugan

Rita M. Bean

This paper describes the meaning-making processes involved as six struggling readers and a teacher interacted to make sense of a story during small group literature discussions. Students were low-achieving fifth graders. They elected to read the book Shiloh (Naylor, 1991)and met as a group for fifteen sessions. Instruction consisted of partner reading, written response followed by discussion and extended free journal writing. Three discussions coinciding with the beginning, middle, and final chapters of the book were selected to analyze changes in student engagement in the process over time. Discussions were audio taped and transcribed for analysis. Qualitative analyses based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and characteristics of constructive discourse (Almasi, 1993) were conducted. Findings revealed that the teacher demonstrated and explained a variety of ways to make sense of the story in response to students' need for support and encouraged them to practice and eventually control the discussions themselves. Students initially expressed reluctance to elaborate and justify their responses and focused on remembering and summarizing the story. However, during the middle discussion, they became initiators and expressed a desire to make decisions about their reading. During the last session, students facilitated the

discussion themselves by responding to one another, and were concerned with expressing and justifying their interpretations rather than remembering or summarizing events. The frequency of sociocognitive conflicts, dialogue in which students disagreed or questioned the text and each other, and the number of student-initiated episodes increased dramatically across the three discussions, indicating a shift of responsibility for meaning-making from teacher to students and higher levels of student engagement in the meaning-making process. Recommendations for supporting students in discussions and encouraging student-centered response to literature are made.

Side-by-Side Reading: Scaffolding Meaning-Making Through Literature Discussions

"…primacy belongs to response, as the activating principle: it creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 282).

Literacy and language are closely related and interwoven throughout classroom discourse (Britton, 1970; Cairney, 1995; Halliday; 1978). Language is not merely a way of communicating, but a way of understanding our world and ourselves. Through language we make sense of events in our lives, interactions with others, and with texts that we read, hear, and construct. Discussion as a powerful medium for using language to make sense of texts has become the focus of much research in recent years (Gambrel & Almasi, 1996). Discussion broadens students' perspectives by giving them a chance to share and explore their own interpretations in the context of other interpretations besides their own. The following exchange is an example of how several fifth grade students make meaning within the context of discussion by questioning and responding to one another as they discuss the book Shiloh (Naylor, 1991).

John: When is Marty going to tell his parents about Shiloh?

Nicole: Never, because that would make him -- Marty's dad - would make...

Allison: …him give the dog back to Judd.

Nicole: Yeah.

John: I never tell my mom anything.

Students: Sooner or later.

John: I keep it a secret the whole time.

In the dialogue above, students' responses depended upon what others in the group were saying. John's question prompted students to explore if and when Marty would reveal that he had Judd's dog, Shiloh, hidden in a pen behind his house. The overlapping speech between Nicole and Allison illustrates how students used dialogue collaboratively to construct meaning. One seemed to know what the other was thinking. When John says that he "never tells his mom anything," students retort "sooner or later" implying that Marty's parents would eventually discover his secret. But John disagreed, insisting that he keeps "a secret the whole time." Meaning was more than a sum of individual responses. It was made through the dialogue with each response being "…understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments…" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 281).

Response-based discussion offers students opportunities to explore multiple interpretations of literature and become actively engaged in the reading experience. McGee (1996) points out, the

purpose of response-centered talk is not to recall all the details of the story, but to discover or construct a new understanding about literature (p. 195). McGee identifies two important hallmarks of response-centered talk: first, children use their own comments to initiate topics of discussion and set the agenda for discussion; second, students and teacher build "a shared, common understanding of a book" (p. 199). Response-centered talk about texts offers students a chance to question the text, voice their ideas, and explore their individual interpretations to deepen their understandings. Response-centered talk also provides an opportunity for the teacher to participate side-by-side with students in the experience of reading a book, to read with them and to them and to demonstrate meaning-making strategies while they work together to understand. Expert readers have been found to be constructively responsive in their reading by using their prior knowledge to make predictions and form hypotheses, by responding emotionally to text, and by monitoring their comprehension (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

According to Gambrell (1996), children can profit from discovering their own insights and from teacher guidance in making sense of text. By participating with students in reading and discussing literature, teachers can foster the development of students' responses (Langer, 1992; O'Flahavan, Stein, Wiencek, Marks, 1992) and facilitate higher levels of talk by centering the discussion around a teacher-generated interpretative question

(McGee, 1992). However, approaches to literature instruction in which teachers impose preconceived meanings on students inhibit their efforts to develop understandings and appreciation of literary texts (Purves, 1992). Likewise, the use of recitation (teacher questions, student response, teacher evaluation) (Mehan, 1979) restricts students' opportunities to talk to one another and build on individual interpretations to construct understandings.

On the other hand, response-based discussions about literature allow students to engage in the lively exchange of ideas and share responsibility for meaning-making (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). Response-based discussions are consistent with reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1938; 1978) which holds that literature is an exploration of personal interpretations and the reader transacts with the text to make meaning. While student-centered discussion has been a topic of research for enhancing understanding, there also has been a resurgence of research examining the nature of literary understanding in an effort to improve literature instruction (Newell & Durst, 1993). Langer (1992) suggests that teachers can help students think more deeply about literature by tapping their initial responses and developing these through discussion.

Reading not only is a process of responding to the text, but also is recognized as a social experience (Bloome, 1985; Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993). That is meaning is constructed through the

social interactions of readers with their world, texts, and others. This is consistent with Vygotsky's theory (1986) that learning begins on a social level where understanding is mediated through talk about text, then moves to an internal, mental level of understanding. Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) found that expert readers actually hold a conversation with the author which incorporates their prior knowledge in an attempt to understand the author's intentions.

The concept of scaffolding has been used to describe the supportive tutoring relationship between a teacher and student or novice and expert(Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Instructional approaches that build on the concept of scaffolding include Rogoff's (1990) concept of "guided participation," Tharp and Gallimore's (1988) assisted performance, and Palincsar's reciprocal teaching (1982). In each of these, the teacher establishes a collaborative relationship with the learner, structures activities that guide and support learning of new knowledge, and gradually transfers responsibility for the task to the learner. Thus, the teacher plays a significant role as guide and facilitator, and coach of the learning process to make it possible for a child to achieve potentially higher levels of learning (Almasi, 1996; Gambrell & Almasi, 1996).

The purpose of this research was to study in depth how less proficient readers jointly construct understandings about literature, specifically a novel, when reading and talking about

the story is done in a small group, collaborative instructional setting. This research represents a continuation of previous analysis of the student-teacher discourse by analyzing three of the original fifteen talk sessions in an attempt to tease out and describe the interactions between three parties -- students, teacher, and text. The instructional setting is also a social setting in which these three entities form a triangle of interaction with the goal being to understand or make sense of the book. The primary aim then was to understand what the teacher does to help students make sense of literature, how students react to the teacher, how they respond to the text, and how they also initiate and respond to one another as they talk about the story. An instructional setting in which students and teacher come together to talk about a book is recognized as an extremely dynamic situation which is rich in talk about text that is highly contextualized and fluid. Therefore, it is next to impossible to study students' responses in isolation of teacher responses in isolation of text. They are continuously interacting with one another and it is through this interaction that meaning is made.

The research questions behind this investigation were: What critical features are highlighted by the teacher to enhance understanding during small group literature discussions? What evidence is there that students internalized the scaffolding processes as they constructed understandings during small group literature discussions?

Participants

This study involved six at-risk readers, four boys and two girls, who were enrolled in a fifth grade class in a rural public elementary school. They ranged from 10 to 12 years of age and were receiving instructional support for their reading difficulties from a reading specialist and high school tutors. The children were identified by their classroom teacher and principal as less proficient readers who were performing below grade level expectations. According to their classroom teacher, the children showed little interest in reading and rarely engaged in independent reading although this was encouraged through regular visits to the school library where books were readily accessible. Regular classroom reading instruction consisted mostly of silent, independent reading of selections in a basal series followed by comprehension questions which students answered and handed in. After meeting with the classroom teacher and principal, the children were invited, with parental consent, to participate in the study. Initially, the children were screened by the first author to rule out the possibility of decoding problems as a primary factor for their poor performance in reading. Two decoding assessments were used: the Names Test (Cunningham, 1990; Duffelmeyer, Kruse, Merkley, & Fyfe, 1994) and a 200 word passage from the book students had selected to read. A score of 90% accuracy was considered sufficient on each assessment. Achievement test results obtained from students' records indicated they had

scored below average to average in reading comprehension. The children's names are pseudonyms.

Procedures

For eight weeks, students met twice a week as a small group for approximately forty five minute lessons outside of their regular classroom to read and discuss the novel Shiloh (Naylor, 1991). Students selected the book from a collection of literature that was recommended by the classroom teacher and first author. The first author served as the teacher/researcher, collaborated with the classroom teacher and principal to conduct this study, and participated in the discussions with the children.

The instructional approach used in this study, Transactional Literature Discussions (Dugan, in press), was based on reader response and scaffolded instruction. A cycle of activities to support reading, writing, and response to literature included: getting ready (previewing text and making predictions); reading and thinking aloud (reading aloud or silently and pausing to verbalize immediate responses); wondering on paper (a brief written response on a Post-it note); talking about it (discussing students wonderings about the story); thinking on paper (an extended free journal response); and looking back (reflecting about what was learned and looking forward to forthcoming events). To help students participate in the talk sessions, RQL2 guidelines were shared and discussed with students. RQL2 is an acronym for respond, question, listen, and link. Students were introduced to

the routines of the instructional approach and to RQL2 during the first two lessons through teacher demonstration in the process of beginning to read and discuss the book.

Data collection. Audio taped discussions provided process data about the teacher-student and student-student talk during the small group discussions about the story. Audio tapes were transcribed for analysis. Video tapes of the sessions were used as a source for describing the nonverbal interactions of students and teacher as well as the arrangement of interaction such as whether students were reading with partners or in the small group and whether the teacher was sitting at the table with the group of students.
After reading all the transcripts, three lessons were selected for this particular study. The selection process was based on the following criteria: discussions corresponded with the beginning, middle, and final chapters of the book; discussions reflected high amounts of teacher-student and student-student dialogue about the story; and discussions revealed a gradual process of letting go or release from teacher to students to allow them to control the talk and take increasingly more responsibility for the meaning-making.

Data analysis. Data analysis consisted of qualitative analyses of the discourse in three discussions with children about the book they were reading. Using "grounded theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), analyses were recursive, involving several readings of the transcripts and moving between the data and theory/research involving scaffolded instruction and literature discussions to

develop a coding scheme. The first phase of analysis focused on answering the question: What critical features are highlighted by the teacher to enhance understanding during small group literature discussions? In this descriptive analysis, exchanges were analyzed in terms of the initiating action and reaction (Erickson & Schults, 1977). Descriptions of actions and reactions were recorded on the transcripts then transferred to a chart where similar descriptions were chunked into categories and assigned headings. (see Figure 1)

Insert Figure 1 about here

The three transcripts were analyzed again by a research assistant using the coding scheme. Interrater reliability was found to be 95%.

A second analysis was conducted to answer the second research question: What evidence is there that students internalized the scaffolding processes as they constructed understandings during small group discussions? Based on the literature supporting the social construction of meaning, discussions of text, and preliminary analyses of the discourse, the following four categories were identified that reflected the growth in meaning-making and internalization of the processes: initiation, appropriation, sociocognitive conflict, and transformation. Initiation refers to the times students initiated episodes of dialogue that focused on a specific topic. Sociocognitive conflict

refers to a conflict, or state of confusion, readers experience with themselves, the text, or others as they attempt to understand what they have read (Almasi, 1993). Appropriation of meaning refers to a process of developing a shared understanding when one uses language to guide and lead another to reconstruct the speaker's perspective (Stone, 1993). Transformation was used to describe the changes that occurred in the students in terms of their ability to transform understandings into their own and as readers who were in control of their meaning-making. The three transcripts were read and student and teacher initiated episodes were identified. Transcripts were read again to identify the instances in the dialogue where students were in conflict with themselves, the text, and others. A third reading involved identifying instances in which students were led to draw inferences and adopt the teacher's or their peers interpretation. In a final reading, instances of transformation were identified by looking across the three lessons to identify shifts in students' behavior as readers and meaning-makers. Through discussions with another researcher and a second analysis of the transcripts, interrater reliability was found to be 92%. In the next section, snapshots from lessons 4, 8, and 13 are presented to discuss the results of the analyses.

Results

Getting Started

The first question in this study dealt with how the teacher encouraged response and scaffolded understanding and

how students reacted when the teacher highlighted ways students could make sense of the book. At the beginning of lesson 4, students gathered around the table to discuss Chapter 3. They have brought their books and journals with them. The teacher has asked them to use their responses in their journals to discuss Chapter 3. However, several students say they cannot remember what they have read. "I don't remember it," responded Donald. "Neither do I," echoed Nicole. This was a roadblock for them and a barrier to discussion. To bridge the gap between students and the text, the teacher encouraged them to use their books and look back through the chapter and their journals. Students proceeded to skim and reread the text. After a few minutes Donald interrupts the silence.

Donald: I remember. I remember what page it's on.

Teacher: That's good.

The teacher asked students to summarize the events of Chapter 3. Students reconstructed the story by retelling the important details and events as each student built on the other's version. According to Wilson and Gambrell (1988), retelling and summarization are effective strategies for improving reading comprehension. Retelling has been found to encourage both literal and interpretive levels of comprehension, while summarization was found to enhance comprehension when coupled with reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). The following scenario illustrates how students jointly constructed a retelling. The teacher gave them

responsibility for regulating the discussion by encouraging them to decide the order of turn taking.

Donald: I'll start.

George: You, then you, then me, then her.

Donald: This guy Judd, he got the dog from Marty and was being real mean to it. He kicked it... Marty doesn't like how Judd wasn't taking care of the dog. So Marty thinks he can earn a lot of money by doing chores for his family so he can buy the dog off Judd.

To encourage other students to contribute, the teacher asked them to add or clarify some ideas. She explained, "Clarify means if something he said wasn't clear, you explain it or say more about it." Allison responded briefly. The teacher restated her response and asked the group why to encourage justification or elaboration.

Allison: He couldn't sleep.

Teacher: Marty couldn't sleep. Why?

Allison: Because he says he was thinking about the dog.

Roy: Whenever Marty goes with his dad to deliver Sears catalogs, his dad is going to give him money so he can buy the dog back.

Donald: That's not what happened.

Nicole: His dad asked him if he would like to go along to deliver the catalogs, so when they were delivering, they stopped at Judd's house and Judd said he didn't feed him (Shiloh) anything that night. And I guess Marty didn't

like how he (Judd) was treating the dog. So he really wanted to buy the dog. And he's going to either recycle cans and take them in or maybe his dad will pay him.

By encouraging students to reconstruct the story as a group, the teacher created a collaborative environment in which individual students support one another in preparation to explore the story further. Although students' retellings might be considered more text-based than reader-based, the process of retelling opens the door for more interpretive forms of thinking as students talk about the story and become engaged in expressing, expanding, and negotiating their understandings. By revisiting the text, students learn to use it as a common ground for discussion.

The teacher plays a powerful role as facilitator and coach, providing students with specific instruction as they need it and numerous opportunities to practice. As Newell & Durst (1993) state, "...the most significant role the teacher might play is one of guiding students in articulating their own responses for possible consideration and revision in light of what other readers -- including teacher, peers, and critics -- say about literary texts" (p.12). As students retell the story, the teacher highlights additional ways students can make sense of the story by inviting them to add new ideas, clarify a point that wasn't clear, explain why a character was behaving in a particular way, and elaborate on story events. At the same time, students are demonstrating for one another how to skim and reread, summarize or

retell, strategies that can be used in the future to remember. Using "why" and "what if" questions, the teacher nudges students to move beyond the literal level of retelling to consider the significance of events and characters actions as in the next exchange.

Teacher: If he(Marty) does chores around the house, does he get paid?

Students: No.

George: His dad said they have to share (the chores).

The teacher pointed out that some responses were similar, then highlighted another point that need clarification. In responding to the teacher's question, students referred to a previous discussion about their experiences with young children.

Teacher: That's what Allison told us too. Another point we need to clarify is that Judd didn't feed the dog that night. Was the dog being bad?

Donald: No. Dogs just like to run around.

Roy: Like little kids.

Teacher: Like you said, they're like ...

Roy: Little kids and they don't know any better.

This was an opportunity to help students view events through the character's eyes and so she asked, "How does Marty feel about this?"

Nicole: He doesn't feel too good about that.

Teacher: How's he feel about Judd?

Allison: He doesn't like him.

Teacher: Why doesn't he like him?

Allison: Because he treats the dog bad.

The teacher accepted Allison's response, however the relationship between Marty and Judd is more complicated so she referred them to the text to reread portions of the story that provide evidence that support students' impression of the characters. After reading aloud, students respond:

Students: He cheated Mr. Wallace.

Donald: He lied too about the money in his wallet.

Teacher: There's another reason on page 23.

Nicole: (Reads)

Students: All talking.

Roy: He killed a deer – shot a buck out of season.

Teacher: Do you think Marty should like him?

Students: No.

Teacher: Would you like him?

Students: No.

Donald: I know someone like him.

By rereading parts of the story together, the teacher was able to help students respond to particular story events that were important in order to understand fully the relationships between characters and the source of their conflict. In doing so, the teacher demonstrated for students how to use the text as evidence (Rosenblatt, 1978; Smith, 1995) to support their interpretations.

Also, this communicated the message that it was acceptable and even necessary to lookback and reread the story in order to understand. Working through the text together also enabled the teacher to model interpretive questions and help students see connections between events. Likewise, the teacher encouraged students to justify and elaborate on their responses and thinking by saying "why." Roy voices his reluctance, but other students follow through.

Teacher: We need to start saying why.

Roy: I hate to say why.

Teacher: It's important to say why.

Nicole: Maybe if he could have the dog for three hundred dollars and Judd might say yes because Marty really likes the dog.

John: I think Shiloh should stay with Marty because he takes care of him better than Judd.

Roy: I think Marty will earn as much money as he needs to because I think that Judd will give him a job to like earn the dog.

Teacher: That might work.

During lesson 4, the teacher occasionally expressed a different opinion or interpretation and highlighted this to make students aware that they could have different points of view. This nudged students to debate and challenge one another.

George: I think Marty will get enough money to buy Shiloh back off Judd.

Teacher: So you think he will earn enough money from picking up cans.

George: Yeah. Cans, bottles, and helping his dad.

Teacher: I don't think so. We disagree. Do you know what that means?

Donald: Yeah.

Teacher: We have different opinions about what will happen.

By modeling how to express a difference of opinion, the teacher communicated the message that it was acceptable to disagree with one another. In later discussions, students voice and debate different opinions.

In a study of remedial readers think aloud protocols, Purcell-Gates (1991) found that students had difficulty interpreting figurative language in literature. In this study, students' questions about the meanings of phrases that included figurative language indicated that they might benefit from instruction that focused on how to make sense of this language. Taking advantage of student's inquisitiveness about the text language, during session 4, the teacher highlighted figures of speech used in the story and explained to students that the author was "playing with words."

Teacher: Let's talk about the way the author plays with words in the story. If you read them just the way they are written, they don't make much sense.

Allison (Reads) "Seals a promise."

George: Keep it a secret.

Roy: Like closing a zip lock bag.

Teacher: Like closing a zip lock bag. If you seal a promise, what are you going to do with that promise?

Allison: Keep it forever.

Teacher: So you follow through with whatever you promised to do.

Allison: He (Marty) could mean he'll try to get him (Shiloh) back.

By pointing out to students that these phrases were not to be taken literally, or "just the way they are written," students were encouraged to make-meaning for themselves rather than to rely solely on the text. Instead, students were encouraged to think creatively. In making sense of the author's figures of speech, students invented their own, as Roy did to compare "sealing a promise" to "closing a zip-lock bag." Then Allison showed students how the language was relevant to the whole context of the story by interpreting it from Marty's point of view. Talking about figurative language invited students to form and share interpretations which broadened their understanding of both the meaning of the language and the creative ways it could be used to convey implicit meanings.

Conversational implicature (Grice, 1989) refers to the process of conveying implied meanings contextually during conversation. This hinges on the cooperative principle, or the assumption that the speaker will make the utterance appropriate to the context and the expectation that he will do so. By calling attention to similarities between speakers comments and responding to students

comments and questions, the teacher helps students realize that what they say needs to be relevant to the conversation. The following exchange is an example of conversational implicature involving students as they discuss what might be considered a reasonable price for the dog.

Nicole: Maybe if he could have the dog for $300.00, Judd might say yes because Marty really likes the dog.

Donald: I said something like Nicole said. Why would he buy that dog for that much?

George: Golden retrievers are that much, but beagles are 25 or 50 dollars.

Roy: Maybe a hundred.

The meaning of this conversation is mediated through the context with each response linked to the central topic of discussion – the worth of the dog. This is a common understanding which students share and around which the discussion revolves. The cooperative principle is at work since students expect that their comments will be relevant to the central topic. There is a mutual understanding among students that they are talking about the particular problem of raising enough money to buy the dog which they know is a beagle, and the question of what is a reasonable price for this particular breed of dog.

Becoming Initiators

During lesson 8, the teacher encouraged students to use their spontaneous responses to initiate the discussion and they became

more outspoken and began posing interpretive questions themselves. They seemed more confident about expressing their ideas and kept the discussion flowing with less teacher assistance although the teacher continued to sit with the group and was available to help when necessary. This next exchange shows students initiating and participating in the discussion.

Nicole: Why does Judd want to hunt on Marty's property?

Donald: He probably thinks the dog's up there, and I think he'd want to shoot the dog.

Nicole: No.

Roy: He'd be charged with murder.

George: He'd say he thought it was a rabbit.

Nicole: He wouldn't shoot Shiloh because he said he's a good hunting dog.

In this exchange, students openly agreed and disagreed with one another. Nicole's question encouraged the group to explore Judd's intentions. While Donald suggested that Judd thinks the dog is there and would want to shoot the dog, Nicole quickly disagreed. Roy seemed to agree with Nicole when he stated that Judd would be charged with murder. George's response implied that he disagree with Roy. Then Nicole asserted herself, using information from the story to justify her belief. As a result, students were made aware that the story could be interpreted from of a variety of perspectives -- the characters,' their own, and others.'

According to Rommetveit, (1979), a sense of mutual trust

between the conversants increases the likelihood that the listener will adopt the speakers' perspective, a process referred to as intersubjectivity. This following dialogue illustrates how the teacher helped students draw the inference by implying that the people in town have been spreading the word that Marty's family is needy.

Donald: (Reads) "Next day dad comes home. Good news for him,bad news for me. Folks are leaving me food in their mail box." What does he mean by that?

Nicole: Because Marty doesn't want Judd to find out about Shiloh.

Teacher: Do you remember when Marty went to Mr. Wallace's store?

Students: Yes.

Teacher: He got some old cheese. What did Mr. Wallace think?

Roy: He might tell Judd.

Teacher: Did Marty tell Mr. Wallace it was for Shiloh?

Students: No

Teacher: So what does Mr. Wallace think?

Nicole: That it's for his parents.

Teacher: For him and his family. And now all the people in this little town of Friendly talk to each other.

Nicole: And they pass it on to each other.

Teacher: And what are they passing on about this family?

John: That they are going through hard times.

Teacher: That they are a little bit needy. They don't have a lot of food. And so what are these nice people in town doing

for the mailman?

Roy: Giving him food. Putting food in the mail box.

Using Socratic questions the teacher made supporting details explicit so that students could make connections and eventually infer that Mr. Wallace has told the people in town that Marty and his family "are going through hard times" and so they are putting food in the mailboxes for them.

Students continued to ask about the meaning of words in session eight, as Roy does in the following scenario. For example, when Roy asked, "What are frankfurters?," the teacher allowed students to explain, and then asked why this was in the story to help them understand the significance of this word.

Teacher: Why is that in the story?

Roy: They were eating hot dogs for lunch.

Donald: Franks.

Teacher: And Marty's been…

Roy: Taking frankfurters up to Shiloh to feed him.

At first, Roy's question seemed insignificant because he focused on the literal meaning of the word. But the teacher helped him link it with Marty's sneaking food for Shiloh so that he and other students in the group see that frankfurters held more significance than just what the family was eating for lunch.

Taking Control

During session thirteen, the teacher removed herself from the group to give students more responsibility for the discussion.

They initiated discussions themselves by using their wonderings about the story, sharing these during talk sessions, and asking "why" questions which they answered themselves. At times, they questioned the meaning of individual responses, provoking students to explain themselves. They also encouraged and respected one another by acknowledging, accepting, and praising each other for contributions to the discussions. This peer support increased their confidence in their ability to make sense of the story and encouraged them to take risks with their thinking. For example, when George indicated that he could not remember the events of Chapter 13, students reassured him that they would help, allowed him to begin with what he could remember and others would add to it. It was a collaborative group effort that made it possible for him and others to participate and be successful.

Although the teacher had removed herself from the group, she was still very much a part of the instructional context. The teacher continued to help students get ready to read by introducing the word "blackmail," a key concept to understanding the motives behind the characters' actions. However, the teacher's approach differed from the traditional approaches to vocabulary development in which students look up and copy dictionary definitions for several words pulled from the story. Instead, students were encouraged to hypothesize what they thought the word meant as well as speculate about its significance within the context of this particular story. Students confirmed or rejected their hypotheses

as they read and discussed the story and made reference to the word in their discussion.

Teacher: Here's a word to think about today. (Writes blackmail on the chalk board)

George: (Reads) "Blackmail." I know what that is.

Teacher: Try it.

John: I know.

George: When someone uses you.

Teacher: Yes, when someone uses you.

Allison: When someone tricks you.

Teacher: It's sort of like that. It is kind of sneaky.

Donald: It's a bribe.

Teacher: It's a bribe. That's another word for it. How do you bribe somebody?

Donald: If you can't get someone to do what you want, you could give them money.

Teacher: So you might give someone money to get them to do something.

Later in the discussion, students made the connection to blackmail again.

Roy: Judd asks Marty if his mom wants the (deer) meat.

Teacher: Why does he ask him that?

Roy: So he wouldn't tell the game warden. He was being nice to him.

Nicole: Sometimes that gets people's minds on other things.

George: He tried to suck up to him.

Teacher: He tried to bribe him, didn't he?

George: Blackmail.

Donald: Yeah!

The teacher sat slightly outside the group, on the side-lines, and entered the discussion to nudge students to link the concept of blackmail to the deal.

Several times during this discussion, Donald asked the group to summarize the chapters. Instead, students chose to share their wonderings and discuss their ideas.

Donald: Can anyone summarize chapter 13?

Students: John didn't go yet.

John: I wonder what's going to happen to Marty cause Judd sees him. And I wonder if Marty is going to tell about the deer.

Nicole: I don't think he'll tell about the deer because he wants to keep Shiloh.

Donald: Why do you think that?

Nicole: Because he really likes Shiloh and when he got hurt he felt sorry for him.

Students wanted everyone to have a chance to voice their wonderings. John's wondering encouraged students to speculate what the characters might do and Donald posed a "why" question which challenged Nicole to justify her position.

Becoming Meaning-Makers

The second phase of the analysis dealt with the question What evidence is there that students internalized the scaffolding processes as they constructed understandings during small group literature discussions? This question assumes that students grow and change as evidence of internalization.

Initiation. Initiation was used to identify the number of times students initiated an episode in which several ideas that centered around a particular topic were exchanged. (see Table 1) In lesson 4, students were found to initiate only 6 of 33 (18%) episodes. Four of these focused on making sense of the story, one focused on procedures, and one was nongenerative. In lesson 8, students initiated 12 of 26 (46%) episodes. Three of these focused on procedures, while the other nine were concerned with questioning and interpreting the story. In lesson 13, 20 of 27 (74%) episodes were student initiated. Fifteen of these episodes focused on understanding story events, one was a reference to another text, one focused on what prompted a student to write a comment, two focused on procedures, and one was nongenerative.

Insert Table 1 about here

Sociocognitive conflict. According to Smith (1995), comprehension is a process of eliminating unlikely alternatives to reduce this confusion. During discussions, students bring these conflicts to the forefront to be debated and reasoned through by

the group. By questioning their own lack of understanding, wondering about the meaning of the text, and by disagreeing and debating with others, students themselves scaffold ways to think and make sense of text. The following is an example of sociocognitive conflict with text and with others during lesson 13.

Roy: Why does Judd have a rifle with him?

Students: He was hunting.

Nicole: He went to hunt doe with the rifle.

Roy: But he was chasing after Marty.

Students: No he wasn't.

Roy: He was trying to get Shiloh.

Students: No he wasn't. No he wasn't.

Roy: Because in Chapter 14, at the very end whenever he's (Marty) walking away, he thinks he's (Judd) going to shoot him.

Allison: Marty thinks he's going to shoot him, but he shot deer, a doe.

In this dialogue, students were trying to understand the story as well as each other. The conflict between Roy and the story and Roy and others provided the impetus for students to engage one another and negotiate an understanding of the story. Contrasting interpretations were brought out in open for all to hear. The conflict between Roy and the other students challenged him to return to the text to defend his position. In the end, students compromised when Allison acknowledged that Roy was partially

correct in his thinking; however, so were the others.

Instances of sociocognitive conflict increased as students assumed more control of the discussions. (see Table 2, During lesson 4, four instances of sociocogntive conflict were found; one with the text, and three with others. Six instances of sociocognitive conflict were found in lesson 8; one with self, two with text, and three with others. During lesson 13, 12 instances of sociocognitive conflict were found: one with self, three with text, and eight with others.

Insert Table 2 about here

Appropriation. Rather than simply telling students what is meaningful or significant, a teacher points to evidence in the story and shares insights that lead students to make connections and draw inferences. Thus, students' interpretations may approach the teacher's, yet students are actively involved in constructing interpretations in their own words by incorporating their own ideas as well as the teacher's. The following dialogue illustrates how the teacher helped students appropriate meaning.

Donald: He's (Marty) allowed to tell because he's (Judd) doing something wrong because you're not allowed to shoot deer out of season.

Teacher: But what about his promise?

Nicole: Yeah, because he really wants to keep Shiloh.

Teacher: Did he make a deal with Judd?

Students: Yeah.

Teacher: So Marty's promise is...

Roy: No, Marty's promise is that he won't tell the game warden that Judd killed the deer out of season.

Teacher: Right. So if Marty tells then he's breaking his promise.

John: Then Judd can break his.

By raising the question about Marty's promise, students are led to consider the consequences if Marty tells. Nicole agrees with the teacher and justifies her position. Using an open ended statement, Roy and John are led to reconstruct the terms of the deal between Marty and Judd.

Transformation. Readers do not understand a text word for word. Instead, they understand the essence of it and this is influenced by their own knowledge as well as the text. Therefore, no two readers form identical interpretations of a text even though their interpretations may be similar because of unique and diverse knowledge and experiences they bring to the reading. Like artists who view the same landscape but paint different pictures of it, readers who read the same text can form different interpretations of it. At the same time, readers who come together to discuss a common text have been found to socially construct a group text, sometimes abandoning their individual interpretations for a shared interpretation (Golden, 1986). Also, readers may be influenced by

the process to the extent that they are changed or transformed by the experience of participating in the event and creating something new. The reader learns about himself as a reader in terms of what he enjoys, appreciates, and understands as well as what he needs to do to help himself understand.

In lesson four, students were timid, even reluctant to engage in the process of sharing responses, both orally and in writing. They also had difficulty writing extended responses to their reading and building on these to form interpretations on their own. They expressed frustration with an inability to remember the story. More importantly, they did not seem to know how to go about remembering or move themselves beyond the level of recall to form interpretations and share them with the group. They relied heavily on the teacher for prompting and approval. Most of their responses were directed to the teacher who students saw as the authority -- the person in charge of the group and one who knew the correct answers. For students to trust themselves and each other as authorities, they need to be placed in that position such as in peer-led (Almasi, 1996) and cooperative groups (Slavin, 1990).

Their reactions during the prereading phases of Lesson 8 were similar. Although they did not express difficulty remembering the story as they had in lesson four, students required a good deal of prompting from the teacher. Still they responded briefly with short phrases and sentences that focused on recall of details. On the other hand, students began to assert themselves in lesson 8 when

they insisted on reading aloud rather than silently because it would help them remember the story. This request suggested that students saw themselves as decision-makers, capable of making choices about their reading. It led to some negotiations with the teacher and a compromise to read half of the chapter silently and half orally. During the discussion of chapter 8, the teacher intentionally assumed a less dominant role to encourage students to take more responsibility for their meaning-making. Still sitting with the group, the teacher withheld her own comments and questions to give students a chance to respond first. Given the opportunity to initiate, students began to take charge of the discussion. They explored and debated ideas on which they agreed and disagreed. When they encountered a roadblock, the teacher was available to pose an interpretive question such as "What do you think about that?" to nudge students to voice opinions or explore another side of the topic. When students raised a question that needed clarification, the teacher was available to ask "What part don't you understand?" This encouraged students to explain, clarify, elaborate, or refer to the text to reread that passage in question -- not only for the teacher, but for the group. Then as a group, students and teacher could discuss it and construct a joint understanding.

Students behaved quite differently at the beginning of lesson 13 than they had in previous lessons. No longer were they hesitant or reluctant. No longer did they seem frustrated or overly

concerned with "remembering." They needed less prompting from the teacher to take risks with their thinking. When presented with the word blackmail, they confidently responded with "I know," and without hesitation explained in their own words what it meant and how blackmail played a part in story. The teacher physically removed herself from the group to give students control of the discussion by placing herself outside the circle of students. This gave students the freedom they needed to talk to each other. Now their responses were directed to the group, not channeled through the teacher. Consequently, students took control of the discussion. They initiated more episodes and dominated the conversation with their own ideas. Using words of encouragement, affirmation, and praise, they nudged each other along the path of meaning-making. Occasionally, the teacher interacted with students from outside the group, like a coach from the sidelines, to help students keep the conversational ball bouncing. Posing an interpretive question, the teacher would up the ante to help students explore their ideas further, but would then sit back and let them resume control and continue the discussion.

Students moved beyond retelling and summarization during lesson 13. In spite of several requests from Donald to summarize the story, students instead shared and discussed their wonderings, questions, and comments. They repeatedly asked each other why the characters behaved as they did and why they thought so. They also evaluated each others' comments, sometimes correcting their

versions of the story, other times disagreeing with their interpretations. As one student diverted from discussing the story events to write and share what he thought about the final chapters, other students listened, seeming to respect his right to do so.

The children involved in this study appeared to be transformed from passive to active readers through the experience of reading and participating in these small-group discussions. Evidence that supports this conclusion includes an increase in their active participation and facilitation of the discussions, accompanied by a gradual move toward interpretive levels of understanding in which students noticed, questioned, and debated incongruencies with others, the story, and themselves. Other evidence included an awareness of self as reader exemplified by an expressed desire to read orally as a group to help themselves understand the story better, a tendency to respond to the story with questions and wonderings, and an ability to engage one another in discussion with and without the teacher. Students gradually accepted responsibility for reading and discussing the story and appeared to appreciate the opportunities to do so.

Discussion

Due to the small number of students involved and the fact that students read a single book, findings are limited to this particular small-group reading experience. As Gambrell points out (1996), "The quality of discussion is affected by factors such as group size, leadership, text type, and cultural background" (p.

32). Recognizing that the text as well as the reader contribute to meaning, students might have responded differently if they had read another book or collection of books. They may have responded differently if they had not selected the book themselves, one that they were interested in reading in the first place. The classroom environment also may restrict how students interact and talk about books. Students in this study had the advantage of working in a space of their own where they could read aloud as a group and with partners, talk among themselves, and move about freely without interrupting other students or class routines. Seating arrangements, time and space for reading and discussion, and number of students in the classroom and the small group are influential factors teachers will need to consider when planning opportunities for shared reading and discussion.

In spite of these limitations, the results of this study are consistent with previous studies that provide compelling evidence favoring small group discussions for enhancing higher levels of thinking about texts (Almasi, 1993; Eeds & Wells, 1989). Results also provide additional support to research that has shown the crucial role the teacher plays in asking interpretive questions to raise the level of thinking during discussions (Weincek & O'Flahavan, 1994; McGee, 1992). Students involved in this study learned not only to make sense of the book they were reading, but to understand themselves as meaning-makers. They came to view themselves as readers who were capable of interpreting text and

more comfortable voicing their interpretations whether they were similar or different. They engaged in meaningful discussions about text as active participants rather than passive recipients. This was an empowering and motivating experience.

The shared reading of a book is a powerful social experience that invites students to think and talk about the story and form interpretations through discussion. Reading side-by-side with students makes it possible for teachers to scaffold for students and for students to scaffold for one another how to make meaning. Moreover, a collaborative learning environment is conducive to reading and discussing literature. By participating with students in the discussion, teachers stand to learn more about students' thinking and their patterns of response so that they can help students elaborate on and revise interpretations. Meaningful social interaction centered around a shared book experience supports students' cognitive and emotional involvement with text and nurtures their individual literacy development. At the heart of this social event in the classroom is discussion. This is where students learn that reading is both a socially and personally meaningful, thoughtful experience.

Implications for Teaching

Considering the results of this study together with the results of previous studies in the use of small group literature discussions, the following implications for holding literature discussions at the elementary were generated:

1. Teachers need to believe that students can become engaged readers who can learn to successfully interpret texts for themselves.

2. Teachers need to be open to creative thinking and multiple perspectives when reading and interpreting texts with students.

3. Teachers need to demonstrate active reading and meaning-making by reading books with students and sharing their own responses to the story.

4. Teachers need to invite students to share their responses to books by facilitating student-centered discussions.

5. Teachers need to create opportunities for students to participate in shared reading experiences.

6. Teachers need to acknowledge students' interests by involving them in making decisions about the books they read and share.

7. Teachers need to give students freedom to practice and polish ways to make sense of books.

8. Teachers need to make themselves available to guide and coach students in holding discussions about books.

9. Teachers need to provide students with assistance in the form of demonstration and verbal explanations about routines and procedures of participating in discussions before expecting children to facilitate discussions on their own.

10. Teachers and students need to work collaboratively to share books and hold discussions in which all group members have a voice.

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Figure 1.

Critical Features of Making Sense

Teacher Action	Student Reaction
Rereading	Skimming and reading aloud or silently during discussion.
Summarizing	Students construct group retellings of the chapter or entire story.
Clarifying	Students add new information and explain old.
Asking "Why"	Students justify or support previous responses as prompted by the teacher.
Saying "Why"	Students are at first reluctant, but then support their thinking without prompting often using the word "because".
If/then	Students consider the consequences of characters' actions and events.
Overlapping Statements	Students complete the speaker's thought.
Looking Back	Students reread silently or orally, then reconstruct story events in their own words.
Noticing Similarities	Students notice that their ideas and comments are similar.
Noticing Differences	Students remark that they said or wrote something different or that they "disagree."
Identifying w/Characters	Students explore characters' motives, infer how they feel, and predict what they will do.

Interpreting Figurative Language	Students interpret underlying meanings of words and images.
Predicting	Students predict future events in the story.
Procedures & Instructions	Informing students about the routine of activities.
Praise & Affirmation	Students are encouraged to express their ideas and engage in discussion.

Unprompted Student Reactions

Nongenerative	Responses unrelated to the story. i.e. getting a drink of water.
Reluctance	Expressing a dislike or unwillingness to participate.

Table 1. Frequency of student and teacher initiated episodes across lessons.

	Lesson 4	Lesson 8	Lesson 13
Student	6 (18)	12 (46)	20 (74)
Teacher	27 (82)	14 (54)	7 (26)
Total	33	26	27

Table 2. Frequency of sociocognitive conflicts across discussions.

	Lesson 4	Lesson 8	Lesson 13
Self	_	1	1
Text	1	2	3
Others	3	3	8
Total	4	6	12